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Committees: Labor, Commerce, Research & Development, ranking Republican; Health & Long-Term Care; Ways & Means; Rules

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## February 11, 2006

Greetings from *sunny* Olympia. Yes, this isn't a typo. The weather has been beautiful here for most of this week. Instead of needing to use an umbrella, I've needed to use my ice scraper on my car's windows during these cold, clear mornings.

This week has been dominated by Senate floor sessions in which we've debated and voted on numerous bills that cleared the Senate committee process, as well as many floor amendments. Like the House, the Senate faces a 5 p.m. deadline next Tuesday (Valentine's Day) to pass bills that originated in our chamber. This means long hours on the floor. The Senate is working this morning (Saturday), but have Sunday off before resuming the long hours on Monday.

After Tuesday's Senate floor cutoff, we'll resume holding committee meetings in which we'll consider bills passed by the House. The 2006 session is scheduled to end March 9.

## Update on bills I've prime-sponsored this session

Here is the latest on the bills that I prime-sponsored this session:

- **Senate Bill 6130** requires the Public Employees Benefits Board to make health savings accounts an option for public employees. It is on the Senate 2<sup>nd</sup> reading calendar.
- **Substitute Senate Bill 6230** extends the state sales and use tax credit for certain public facilities districts (PFDs). This measure, which was passed this week by the Senate Ways and Means Committee, is designed to help the proposed regional events center associated with the Wenatchee downtown waterfront project. SSB 6230 is on the Senate 2<sup>nd</sup> reading calendar.
- **Senate Bill 6333** requires voters to provide photo identification when they vote at the polls. It is still in the Senate Government Operations and Elections Committee. Valid photo ID would include a valid driver's license, a valid state identification card, a valid

U.S. passport or a valid tribal identification card. The chair would not schedule a hearing on this bill.

- **Senate Bill 6734** freezes our minimum wage at \$7.63 per hour and also requires the Washington State Institute of Public Policy to do an extensive study on how it affects the state economy. SB 6734 is stuck in the Labor, Commerce and Research and Development Committee, but a similar measure introduced by Sen. Jim Hargrove (SB 5551) was passed 43-1 by the Senate on Monday this week.

- **Senate Bill 6763** calls for the state to recognize hydroelectric power as a renewable energy resource and to encourage its use. It is in the Senate Water, Energy and Environment Committee.

- **Senate Bill 6625** establishes a habitat and recreational lands coordinating committee to advise the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation and other state agencies on land acquisitions. This bill is on the Senate 2<sup>nd</sup> reading calendar.

- **Senate Bill 6724** expands the Law Enforcement Officers' and Fire Fighters' Retirement System (LEOFF) Plan 2 so that a death benefit is available when a Plan 2 member dies as a result of illness while employed. Under the measure, the amount of the death benefit for Plan 2 members would be adjusted annually for inflation, beginning July 1, 2006. The bill is on the Senate 2<sup>nd</sup> reading calendar.

- **Senate Bill 6760** prohibits mosquito control districts from issuing fees or a tax on cities, churches, and other entities that are exempt from the property tax. This measure is still in the Senate Government Operations and Elections Committee.

### **Budget Tidbits...just the facts**

Sen. Joe Zarelli, the ranking Republican member of the budget-writing Ways and Means Committee, each week publishes *Budget Tidbits...just the facts* on the Senate Republican Web site. This week's edition (Budget Brief #5) talks about inflating the spending limit. To find this year's editions of Budget Tidbits, go to <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/SRC>, then click on SRC Media Center and scroll down.

### **Senate considers multiple measures to make our kids safer and get tough on sex offenders**

As part of the Republican Commitment to Washington, we have pledged to work for passage of Jessica's Law in Washington. This proposal has received significant coverage in the media. There are, however, other key measures being considered to help make our communities safer from these offenders. The Senate yesterday (February 9) passed 17 sex offender bills. Three of them are:

**Senate Bill 6144** – This measure makes sex offender registration requirements apply retroactively to sex offenders that were convicted prior to enactment of the registration law in 1990. In addition, the bill changes from 30 days to three days the amount of time an offender has to register when released from custody. This bill cracks down on all sex offenders, because any offender can pose a threat to our communities.

**Senate Bill 6502** – This measure creates a statewide victims’ notification system to more quickly let victims know when an offender is released from custody; if an offender is out of compliance with post-release conditions; or when a court proceeding is scheduled at which the victim may be present. This bill is important to victims and their peace of mind – not knowing an offender’s whereabouts makes it difficult for victims to restore normalcy to their lives.

**Senate Bill 6519** – This measure requires high-risk registered sex offenders to report in person to the local sheriff’s office every 90 days for five years. Violations extend the time the offender must report in. The measure also allows the sheriff’s office to photograph the offender to update the offender’s file at any time. The message in this bill is that “we’re watching you.”

### **Senate votes to expand property tax exemptions for low-income seniors**

Under current law, low-income seniors and persons retired on disability may apply for property tax exemptions and deferrals on their home and up to one acre of land on which their home sits. **Senate Bill 6338** increases the amount of land to five acres if local zoning laws prohibit that land from being subdivided. This is particularly important to persons in rural areas. Sometimes the land beyond one acre is assessed at a higher value than that portion on which the home is located resulting in higher property taxes. This burden can force people out of their long-time family home.

### **Court forces decision on shipment of wine and beer to local retailers**

Under current Washington law, out-of-state wine and beer producers must ship to in-state retailers through distributors. In-site wineries and breweries may distribute their own products directly to retailers. A federal district court judge has ruled that this difference violates the Commerce Clause of the United States Constitution. Judge Pechman stayed her order until April 14 to give the Legislature time to act. Other issues may arise from the lawsuit brought by Costco, but for now the Legislature must even the playing field. To protect Washington’s small wineries and microbreweries from having to pay a third party to deliver their products, the Senate approved a compromise measure, which I helped craft, that will allow out-of-state producers to deliver directly to Washington retailers. In addition, the bill creates a task force to conduct a comprehensive review of our state’s regulatory system controlling the sale and distribution of beer and wine.

(**Senate Bill 6823** passed the Senate on a vote of 48-0.)

### **Bill to ensure prostate cancer screening is covered by insurance wins Senate approval**

**Senate Bill 6188** addresses the problem that men’s health issues are too often ignored. For many years, mammograms for women to screen for breast cancer have been covered by insurance when recommended by a physician. Prostate cancer is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of cancer deaths in Washington. Lung cancer is number one, breast cancer is number three. Early detection is the key to preventing deaths and saving health care dollars. A simple and inexpensive blood test can be done to help detect early prostate cancer. (SB 6188 passed the Senate on a vote of 42-1)

**State's Family Leave Act expanded**

**Substitute Senate Bill 6185** puts the federal family leave law into state statute. It requires that employers grant twelve weeks of unpaid leave to an employee to care for a new child or ill family member is placed in state law. SSB 6185 passed on a vote of 37-12. I voted against this proposal. Since its provisions are already required by federal law, this bill is not necessary.

**Consumer Protection Hotline 1-800-551-4636**

In 2005, the Washington State Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division recovered \$9 million for Washington residents. This division of the AG's office is an important tool for constituents who have needed assistance over the years. Attorney General Rob McKenna assigned two more attorneys and a computer forensics investigator to the division, plus he developed a new unit to focus specifically on scams that target senior citizens and other vulnerable populations. Citizens in need of help may call the Hotline number or file a complaint online at [www.atg.wa.gov](http://www.atg.wa.gov).

**Department of Health provides information on pandemic influenza**

The news in recent months about avian flu has alarmed some people and resulted in many questions about the flu and risk of a pandemic. The Washington State Department of Health recently released this PDF about pandemic influenza. It's a very informative and useful Q&A document on this important health issue. I encourage you to take a look at this PDF.



**Avian Flu \_001 .pdf**  
(249 KB)

Since the Senate is in session today, I won't be coming home this weekend, so I look forward even more to returning to Wenatchee the following weekend. At least the sunny weather in Olympia this week makes me feel more at home. In the meantime, please continue sending me your comments, suggestions and questions about the issues included in this e-mail update or on any other issue before the Legislature. Have a great weekend!

Sincerely,

*Linda*

**LINDA EVANS PARLETTE**

**Washington State Senator, 12th District**

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